

SERVING MOAB AND SOUTHEASTERN UTAH SINCE 1896

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Thursday, July 31, 2003

WEATHER FORECAST

Thursday
Partly Cloudy
High 70° Low 70°
Friday
Mostly Sunny
High 70° Low 70°
Saturday
Mostly Sunny
High 70° Low 69°
Sunday
Mostly Sunny
High 70° Low 69°

Read all about it!

Look inside for the
Times-Independent's
first weekly event,
a 7½ hour historic
countryside, pioneer, rail
estate fairings, caulkings
and more.

Peter Lawson
and his wife, Ruth,
will host the event
at the Sun Spa on
July 31. See page B1.



Jack Beeson
and his mother, Ruth,
will host the event
at the Sun Spa on
July 31. See Extra! Pg. 1.



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WEATHER HISTORY

Date High Low Precip
July 23 104 75 —
July 24 105 72 —
July 25 103 74 50
July 26 104 74 —
July 27 102 74 —
July 28 102 68 19
July 29 to be listed
next week



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County County mulling special election on term limits, council size, partisan politics

by Lisa Church
contributing writer

Should Grand County return to partisan politics? Should the county council be reduced to five members, all elected to at-large seats? Should term limits that currently bar council members from seeking a third consecutive term be abolished? Voters could have the opportunity to weigh in on all three issues early next year if some county council members succeed in their push to get the council to approve a special election — which could cost the county about \$3,500 — to change aspects of the county's form of government.

For months, the council has quietly debated the issue. And while council chair Jim Lewis points out that those conversations have sometimes occurred in meetings open to the public, such as the council's working retreats, the proposed changes of government has not been discussed while the public or the news media was present at council workshops or regular meetings.

"It hasn't been listed (as a discussion item) on the agenda," Lewis said.

Some council members have, in the past, declined to be interviewed on the subject until legal questions regarding implementation of any changes could be answered. But in a KZMU radio interview this week, Lewis said the council is working with its options for getting the issues before the public.

Some of the proposed changes — returning to partisan politics, and eliminating term limits — could be made implemented by a two-thirds council vote, while other must go before the voters. But the council appears unlikely to make the changes without voter approval.

Last year a group of local citizens gathered more than 700 signatures for a ballot initiative that would let voters decide whether to reduce the council to five members and eliminate districts, making all council members at-large representatives. That initiative is already slated for the November 2004 ballot.

But council member Rex Tanner said timing is a concern because significant changes to the council such as reducing the number of elected members could take years to fully implement if the voters do not approve them until the November 2004 election.

If it were wait until the general election and people decide they want to go back

to how, you'd have to wait until the next general election to implement it," Tanner said.

And even if a special election is held in February or March and voters approve the smaller council size, the county must still determine whether all five elected council members would have to compete for the five seats, or whether three would be elected in 2002 and keep their seats for the full four-year term to which they were originally elected.

Tanner, who, along with Nate Knight and Judy Carmichael is a council member, believes the reduction, if approved by voters, should come from those council seats up for reelection in 2004.

"It doesn't have anything to do with me personally. I don't want to see anybody get out of a seat the people have already made," he said.

He also points out that if all the council seats are up for election in the same year, some candidates would be forced to run for two-year seats that year while others competed for four-year seats. When those two-year positions come up for reelection, they would be converted to four-year terms. That would prevent a scenario in which every council seat came up for reelection in the same year.

Tanner, one of the council members pushing for a special election, said he strongly supports eliminating term limits, and reintroducing partisan politics into county elections. He also favors making all districts at-large. As for whether the number of council members should be reduced, Tanner says he "could live with it" either way.

Even though Tanner believes Grand County's largely Democratic lean, he said partisan politics give counties added influence with state officials and with state legislators.

"I've never been in favor and I've never felt comfortable with a two-party system in our country," Tanner said. "But it is the way it is and to maximize the potential for things we can do for everybody on the state level, we need to have party politics. We're really missing the boat."

Tanner looks doing away with term limits for the same reason.

"People who are in county politics for a long time build relationships upstate (with the Utah Legislature). I think of San Juan County Commissioner Bill Field."

Continued on Page V2

Five proposals for essential air service expected soon

by Lisa Church
contributing writer

A decision on who will provide Moab's essential air service could come as early as mid-September, U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) officials said Tuesday.

John McCamant, transportation industry analyst for the DOT, said his agency hopes to mail to Grand County a summary of proposals from the five interested airlines within the next week, and will then wait two weeks for the county to notify the DOT of its preference. At that point, McCamant said, the agency could issue a contract in September.

The issue of who will provide Grand County's EAS service has been up in the air for the past several months due to questions surrounding congressional funding for the program, per passenger costs proposed in the airline bids, and time required to process the submitted bids. The DOT was close to requesting community input a few weeks ago, when the state of Arizona told the DOT that it wants its airlines interested in servicing Canyonlands Field submitted flight schedules that included trips between Moab and Page, Ariz.

"We said (Arizona) we would separate the Arizona cases from the Utah cases," McCamant said. "Then we asked the airlines to resubmit their bid proposals based on the change. All five resubmitted."

Most airlines submitted more than one bid because they proposed different service alternatives. For instance, Salomon Air submitted 10 different bids for as many different service alternatives, including either two or three daily roundtrip flights from Moab to Salt Lake City, and a route that provides service from Moab to Salt Lake City through Vernal. Great Lakes Airlines currently provides service both to Moab and to Vernal, and EAS contracts for both cities are now up for renewal.

But before a final decision can be made, DOT officials must still solve the problem of per passenger subsidies. Federal law prohibits the agency from paying more than \$200 per passenger in EAS subsidies, but McCamant said some of the bid proposals exceed the \$200 limit.

The Grand County Airport Board, and the county council have already expressed support for Mesa Airlines (also known as Air Midwest), but that was before the final route proposals and costs were negotiated with the DOT. Currently, McCamant said, all five airlines — Mesa, Great Lakes Airlines, Salomon Air, Arizona Express, and Sonnet Airlines — are still in the running.

But he hopes the issue will be settled in the next several months.

"We're a long way from making a decision," he said. "This thing has been sitting on my desk for such a long time. It's my number one priority."

Can you hear me now? Technology improvements mean more business for Grand County

(Part 1 of a 2-part series)
by Lisa Taylor
contributing writer

One of the proposals, blamed for Moab's stagnant non-tourism economy in the late '90s was that Southeast Utah was so far behind in terms of internet, wireless and other information technology, that the area couldn't possibly attract entrepreneurs.

While there are still cell phone "dead spots" and the average internet user still gets pointed off line a few times a week, things are looking up. Verizon Wireless spent \$10 million in its Utah network last year, including upgrading the two Moab cell sites to provide digital service that improved signal and allowed for bells and whistles like cameras, phones, text messaging and high-speed wireless internet.

County residents are more reliant on their cell phones, and many have extended their land lines altogether as the cracks-and-bells factor fades. In terms of business development, though, the most useful improvements have been in internet service.

In 1993, when Brad Boyle and his wife Gita moved to Moab to set up Walkabout Travel Gear LLC, they didn't worry about connection speed for their internet-based retail business, because it had never been a problem. They were in for a rude awakening. "It was almost impossible to do the business when we moved here," says Brad. "We started with 14.4 (modem speed); we got dropped all the time, and sometimes couldn't get online at all. It was pretty slow, and it was pretty hard."

The upside was that the problem forced Boyle to design a website that anyone could move around in quickly, no matter how slow their computer or internet connection. Walkabout toughed it out, tested and dropped a store-front operation on Center Street, and is still going strong.

One of the things that helped was the local launch of high-speed DSL.



Photo by Lisa Taylor

School District to hold first of quarterly open forums on Aug. 6

Grand County School District will begin holding quarterly Open Forums and the first one will be held August 6, 2003, from 7:00-8:30 p.m. in the auditorium of the Grand County High School.

The purpose of this forum is to provide information to the public about issues, programs and plans and also to receive input and questions from patrons of Grand County School District. At this meeting, time will be given to discuss the elementary through eighth grade Monday early outs and other issues.

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